

Parental Divorce and In-School Adolescents' Interpersonal Relationship in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of parental divorce on secondary school students' interpersonal relationship in Benin Metropolis. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample size of two hundred and sixty-one (261) from 10 co-educational schools was used for the study. A structured questionnaire titled Parental Divorce and Interpersonal relationship Questionnaire (PDIRQ) was used to obtain information from the respondents. The psychometric properties of the instrument were established, the reliability coefficient value of .785 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation and independent sample t-test. The findings revealed that parental divorce has no major influence on the students' interpersonal relationship. Similarly, regardless of sex and age, parental divorce was not found to have any significant influence on the students. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the existing co-parenting of extended family system that appears to help in the reduction of the negative impact of divorce on children in Africa and Benin City, Edo State in particular should be sustained. Besides, school counsellors and administrators should continue to assist students of divorce parents to adjust adequately in school.

Keywords: Parental divorce, In-school adolescents, Interpersonal relationship

Introduction

Parental divorce is a serious issue affecting significant numbers of children each year. It occurs when a married union between a husband and wife cease to exist, thus each of the spouse part their different ways, leaving the children with either of them or either of their parents. According to Ukpon (2014) it is a legal dissolution of marriage relationship or any separation of a man and a woman according to established custom. In the past, it was perceived as something very serious and not encouraged. However, it has gradually become a tolerated practice among couples

in Africa and Nigeria inclusive. Offiong and Gberevbie (2018) asserted that approximately 35% to 50% of Nigerian children less than 18 years of age have experienced parental divorce and live in single – parenting homes. With the percentage of children experiencing parental divorce as indicated above, it presupposes that some parents in distressed marriages are looking at divorce as a solution to their problems. In their plight to address their distressed marriages, little attention seems to be given to the children wellbeing especially their ability to interact healthily with others.

Some students of such families usually act out their distress about their divorced parents by acting aggressive and engaging in bullying behaviour, both of which can negatively affect the student’s ability to form positive and meaningful interpersonal relationship with peers and teachers in school environment. Other children may experience anxiety, which can make it difficult for them to seek positive social interactions and engage in social beneficial activities such as sports or debates. Students from divorced home appear to be at elevated risk for fighting, stealing and exhibiting hostility towards adults among others. Often, some of these problems may be related to juvenile delinquency instead of parental divorce.

Interpersonal relationship refers to as a correlative social and emotional intimacy between two or more individuals interacting in either a family or school. DeVito (2012) sees it as a shared perception by two people of an on-going interdependent connection that results in the development of relational expectations and varies in interpersonal intimacy. Interpersonal relationship according to (Kenny et al., 2013) increases in adolescence and is characterized by the establishment of friendship, self-disclosure, emotional support, acceptance and excitement. The quality of one’s interpersonal relationship is a major indicator of an individual’s psychosocial adjustment. Factors like personality, attitude and environment are predicated to influence the totality of one’s relationship which can either be positive or negative. Negative relationship qualities manifest in rivalry, betrayal, hostility, and dishonesty while Positive relationship qualities are portrayed in respect, assistance, honesty, loyalty, closeness and trust (Pitan et al., 2022).

The nature of interpersonal relationship varies among students in school environment. These relationships can be personal and positive whereby students interact meaningfully, share mutual friendship with their peers and it can also be personal and negative when students dislike another, create tension and crisis for others. Positive interpersonal relationship is an instrumental help for amity in shared activities and a basis for social and emotional development. In the context

of a student's life, positive interpersonal attachments to parents, teachers and peers may foster healthy social, emotional and intellectual functioning (Connell & Wellborn, 1991 as cited in Martin & Dowson, 2009). Parent-child interactions are forces that lead to a better interpersonal relationship in school. Peer relationships provide a distraction from distress due to parental separation or conflict occurring in the home environment and provide the opportunity for play and positive socialization. Children of divorced or separated parents benefited significantly from friendships where the other child is also going through the same experience because this validated their feelings (Moen, 2023). Students from divorced families may tend to develop unhealthy interpersonal relationship over time and then expand to dissatisfaction with the school. This may result to venting their negative emotions on others, such as fighting with classmates at school and exhibiting hostility towards others. In the long run, the student interpersonal relationship is weakened and the negative interpersonal relationship is strengthened.

Literature revealed that students who had experienced a parental divorce had a much more difficult time forming relationships with their peers (Babalis et al., 2014). Some students from divorced homes are slow to involve themselves in social interaction, while others pour out their aggression during social interaction. Anthony et al. (2014) noted that children often lag behind in interpersonal social skills and academic due to the stressors of divorce, and they often have a difficult time catching up to their peers.

Generally, there is paucity of research evidence in literature examining how divorce influences students' interpersonal relationship based on age and sex. Njoroge (2013 cited in Karanja, 2016) established that young adolescents age 9 – 14 are intensely loyal to their close peer groups. They tend to seek social stature within these peer groups, they even try out new behaviours as they search for personal identity and social positions. However, it seems that boys, more than girls, tend to be more aggressive toward others and this can lead to their friends and peers rejecting them. Girls have shown more depressive symptoms especially in absence of father in early stages as compared to male children (Culpin et al., 2013).

The rising rate of divorce is alarming globally and in Nigeria in particular. The effect is multidimensional in nature as the divorced couples, the children and the society all have a share in it. On the children, it can lead to poor academic performance, low self-esteem and poor interpersonal relationship. They are more likely to lack emotional support sequel to parents'

neglect. Consequently, develop into emotional instability that can indirectly affect their relationship with their peers in school that can heighten hostility, aggression, bullying, isolation or withdrawal from peers among students. Researchers (Ahiaino, 2013; Sani, 2019) have looked at psycho-social effect of parental divorce on adolescent as well as its effect on emotional and social adjustment. However, there appears to be a dearth of research work on parental divorce influence on students' interpersonal relationship.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of divorce on the psychological well-being of in-school adolescents in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Specifically; to investigate the extent to which parental divorce determine students' attitude towards schooling and self-esteem. To investigate the extent to which parental divorce determine students' interpersonal relationship towards their peers. Hence this study seeks to address the issue with the following research questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. To what extent does parental divorce determine students' interpersonal relationship with their peers?
- ii. Is there a significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex?
- iii. Is there a significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 levels of significance.

- i. There is no significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex.
- ii. There is no significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age.

Methodology

Survey research design with descriptive method was used for the study. The population of the study consisted all the three thousand nine hundred and thirty six (3,936) secondary school

students in SS1 and SS2 from all the 12 public senior secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. Ten (10) co-educational schools were randomly selected and in each school, a proportionate stratified random sampling technique of 30% was used to sample a total of nine hundred and eighty five (985) senior secondary school students. From the questionnaire administered to the participants, those that ticked the column (divorced) were 261 respondents hence, forms the sample size of the study. The instrument used for data collection was Parental Divorce and Interpersonal Relationship Questionnaire (PDIRQ). The questionnaire consisted six items on interpersonal relationship towards peers which the respondents were expected to tick. For the purpose of scoring the various items on the instrument, the response levels of four point likert scale; Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were weighed as 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively for all positively worded items and reverse for all negatively worded items.

The instrument was validated by three experts in Counselling Psychology and Educational Evaluation. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine its reliability and the coefficient value of .776 was obtained. The data collected through the questionnaire from the 261 respondents were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and independent sample t-test.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent does parental divorce determine students' interpersonal relationship with their peers?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Interpersonal Relationship from Divorced Homes with Their Peers.

Variable	N	Calculated Mean	Std. Dev.	Maximum Score Obtainable	Remarks
Interpersonal Relationship	261	16.15 (67.3%)	2.95	24 (100%)	High

Table 1 shows the descriptive data with respect to the extent parental divorce determine students' interpersonal relationship with their peers. From the table, the mean score of students' interpersonal relationship is 16.15, with Standard Deviation of 2.95. The maximum score obtainable was 24 (100%). When the obtained mean (67.3%) is compared with the maximum score obtainable. It can be said that parental divorce determines students' interpersonal relationship to a high extent. This is because they scored high in terms of their level of interpersonal relationship.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test of the difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	p-value (Sig. 2-tailed)
Male	97	16.02	3.11	2		
				259	.542	.588
Female	164	16.23	2.86			

$\alpha = .05$, $p > .05$ Not Significant

Table 2 shows the difference in the level of interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex. From the table, the number of respondents N (Male = 97; Female = 164) while Mean values and (standard deviations) are 16.02 (3.11) and 16.23 (2.86) for males and females respectively. The t-value of .542 is not significant, because, the p-value (.588) is greater than alpha level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that significant difference does not exist in the levels of interpersonal relationship of male and female students from divorced homes.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test of difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age

Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	p-value (Sig. 2-tailed)
≤ 15yrs	95	15.96	3.19	2		
				259	.793	.428
> 15yrs	166	16.26	2.80			

$\alpha = .05$, $p > .05$ Not Significant

Table 3 shows difference in the level of interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age brackets. From the table, the number of respondents N (≤ 15 years = 95; > 15 years = 166) while Mean values and (standard deviations) are 15.96 (3.19) and 16.26 (2.80) for respondents ≤ 15 years and > 15 years respectively. The t-value of .793 is not significant, because, the p-value .428 is greater than alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies

that there is no significant difference in the level of interpersonal relationship of students from divorced home within the age levels ≤ 15 years and > 15 years.

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that parental divorce determines students' interpersonal relationship to a high extent. This is because they score high in terms of their level of interpersonal relationship. It implies that students' interpersonal relationship is largely dependent on parental divorce. The finding corroborates the assertion of Ahiaomo (2013) and Sani (2019) that parental divorce influence adolescents' adjustment, interpersonal relation, emotional stability and social adjustment. The finding implies the weak support system of the hitherto strong African extended family system where extended family members take the responsibilities of caring for their grandchildren in case of divorce incident. However, the finding of this study runs contrary to the assertion of Zardini et al (2021), Schaan et al (2019), and Whitton et al (2008) that the support provided friends, peers and others can increase the motivation and enthusiasm of students from divorced homes in continuing their social life.

The finding further showed that there was no significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by sex. This implies that the level of interpersonal relationship for male and female students from divorced home is relatively the same when compared statistically. This finding disagrees with the assertion of Kartik and Audichya (2018) that revealed a significant difference in the levels of interpersonal bonding among adolescent boys and girls with their peers. However, their study was not on adolescent boys and girls from divorced families with their peers. The finding corroborates the assertion of Olorunfemi-Olabisi (2014) that revealed no significance difference in the social attitude of male and female secondary school students from divorced homes. The finding of this study can be attributed to the school environment, including the teachers and peers who provide social support and warm environment for students from divorced homes irrespective of their gender. It could equally imply that the parental divorce did no input any serious negative disposition on the children as most divorced couples have an undertaken through the law court on the best means to ensure the welfare of the children.

The finding shows no statistically significant difference in the interpersonal relationship of students from divorced homes by age. This implies that the level of interpersonal relationship for

students from divorced home who are 15 years and below and 16 years and above are the same when compared statistically. This finding is however not in agreement with the finding of Karanja (2016) who asserted that interpersonal relationship is significantly influenced by age. A possible reason for the finding of this study could be that the school environment, including the teachers and peers provide social support and warm environment for students from divorced homes irrespective of their age.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the secondary school students in Benin Metropolis (Egor Local Government Area) who are from divorced home do not have any interpersonal relationship problem due to their parental divorced. Besides, there is no significant difference between gender and age of secondary school students from divorced home in Benin Metropolis (Egor Local Government Area), Edo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

- i. Secondary schools environment should be warm, welcoming and supportive for all students including those from divorced homes irrespective of their sex and age, as this will help maintain their high level of interpersonal relationship with their peers.
- ii. Sensitization programs on co-parenting should be carried out in schools on a regular basis to educate parents on the importance of co-parenting as an adjustment factor for students from divorced homes, to ensure that their psychosocial development is not adversely affected.

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